RITUAL STRUCTURE

The Muslim section of the population belongs to the Sunni sect and follows the religious pattern laid down in the Koran as interpreted by the founders of this sect. A devout Muslim is expected to offer prayers five times a day. In Shamirpet this would be the exception rather than the general rule. Some of the Muslim elders offer prayers twice a day, some only once and the rest are contented with their weekly prayers on Friday. The Mulla, the Muslim priest in the village, is the only person who offers the prescribed prayers every day. Fasting during the month of Ramzan is undertaken by a very large number of Muslims, but those maintaining it without a break until the end of the month would not total even a quarter of that number. The Muslims have a high degree of community-consciousness, but in Shamirpet it does not find expression in the form of intense religious devotion among the adherents of the Islamic faith.

With the exception of the Brahmin and the Komti castes, the Hindus have no fixed time for daily worship. The number of people who visit a temple or shrine every day is negligible. But festivals and ceremonies are observed with unfailing regularity. Otherwise the gods are remembered only at times of disease or difficulty. As a rule, only some of the elderly people devote themselves to 'the daily duty of remembering the creator'; the younger people 'have much else to do'. They participate in ceremonies, partake of the festival feasts, and assemble to listen to the reading of the holy books and to the recitation of mythological legends by professionals when they happen to visit the village. The tasks of remembrance and repentance are postponed for old age. Among both men and women, only the elders seem to talk about 'the change of times' and 'the decline in the religious attitudes and ethical standards of the people'. In the everyday thought and speech of the younger generation there is very little of religion; and little conscious effort at seeking any deep religious experience or thrill is to be found among them. In the life of the community under observation, we noticed only two exceptions to this. One of these is the *Urs*, a semi-religious fair, commemorating Jalal Miyan, a local Muslim divine with some reputation for being a holy man. This fair is sponsored by the Muslims but is largely attended by the Hindus also. The second is the annual worship of a village goddess organized by the village. On both these occasions several people are temporarily possessed by the spirit